



Website and Social Media Policy

This policy was adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 13 April 2023 and was last reviewed at its meeting held on 10 April 2025

1. Introduction

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice providing guidance to councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the Internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- The Council website
- Council Emails
- Facebook and any other social networking sites
- Blogs and discussion forums

The principles of the Policy apply to councillors and any appointed third-party website or social media service provider to the Council. It is also intended for guidance for members of the public communicating with the Council. This Policy sits alongside other relevant existing polices which need to be taken into consideration.

No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it.

The website is not intended to replace existing forms of communication and existing means of communication should continue.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or oral communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

The Council will also protect personal data in compliance with the General Data Protection Legislation 2018 and any subsequent legislation.

2. Council Website Policy

This policy covers the management of the Council website, in particular:

- The scope of the website
- Management of the website and role of the Webmaster
- Criteria and procedures for making changes or additions to the website.

2.1 Website Hosting Arrangements

The Council is committed to operating a website hosted by a third-party provider, having no other connection with the Council. The current system is a “Content Management System” where the Council itself has direct control of day-to-day editing, updating and maintenance.

2.2 Who determines what should be on the website?

Subject only to the requirements of the law, Council has the right to determine what should or should not be included on the website.

2.3 What the website should contain

The website will be used to

- Post minutes, agendas and dates of Council meetings;
- Advertise events and activities, good news stories;
- Advertise Council vacancies;
- Share information from community partners i.e. police, schools and health authorities etc;
- Announce new information relevant to the parish;
- Post or share information from other parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups;
- Refer resident queries to the clerk.

The website may also contain other material, such as history and geography of the parish, news of local events, or any other material of a non-controversial nature which is appropriate for the website.

The website shall in principle not contain material of a deliberately contentious, offensive or disputatious nature, or material that criticises or implies criticism of one or more members of the public, individual councillors, groups of councillors or the Council as a whole.

Regardless of what has been voted on by Council, the website shall not contain any material that is libelous or defamatory or in any way against the law or which could expose the Council to legal challenge.

Links to websites that serve the community with impartial information or news will be considered by request and at the discretion of the Council.

2.4 The Webmaster

An appointed third party and/or a councillor nominated by the Council to have administrative access will act as Webmaster(s) and will be responsible for maintaining and updating the site.

Where the nominated councillor Webmaster has managed the website in a manner contrary to the will of the Council, the Council may require the councillor Webmaster to make good any deficiencies, or in extreme cases, pass a motion of “No Confidence” in the councillor Webmaster and relieve them of their role on the website. In that case, another councillor nominated by the Council should take back control of the website password and block any further activities by the councillor Webmaster.

The website password will be changed when the nominated councillor is no longer a member of the Council and when a new clerk is appointed.

2.5 Procedure for adding new material to the website

Any councillor may submit material for inclusion on the website PROVIDED THAT it is consistent with the general policies in section 3 and also falls within any limits of technical feasibility to upload.

2.6 What are the specific powers of the Webmaster in determining what can go on the website or in editing what is already there?

2.6.1 Routine updates

The Webmaster may make routine updates to the website without prior reference to Council. Examples of routine updates could be: - Correcting errors of spelling, syntax or grammar and factual errors. - Repairing and restoring links that have ceased to work properly. Replacing out of date documents with current versions.

2.6.2 Preservation of archival material

It is understood that Archival Material should be preserved without change to the content but can be reorganised or re-structured as required. If the Webmaster considers other “non- archival” material to be out of date and no longer relevant, such as advertising an event that no longer takes place, he/she may consider it for deletion. If the deletions are substantial, it would be advisable to check with councillors prior to making significant deletions or significant changes to existing material, for example, by creating an “update plan” that Council can approve.

2.6.3 Resolution of Disputes

If there is a dispute about the Webmaster’s decisions or activities, the Chair shall adjudicate in the first instance, and if this fails to provide a resolution, the matter shall be referred to full Council whose majority vote shall be considered final.

2.6.4 The Webmaster will ensure that the following documents are uploaded to the website:

- Agendas and Minutes
- Annual parish Meeting
- Annual Accounts documents
- Standing Orders
- Councillors’ specific responsibilities
- Upload of policies/compliance documents

2.6.5 The Webmaster will also:

- Publish News updates as and when required.

3. Parish Council Social Media (Facebook) Policy

The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Darrington and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents within the parish.

3.1 Guidelines

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful, energised and consistent with the Council’s mission and goals, we ask that the following guidelines are adhered to:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Council members will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.

- Refrain from using the Facebook page for commercial purposes or to market products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people.

3.2 Facebook Messenger Facility

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through the Facebook channel. Instead, please see our contact details on <https://darrington-pc.gov.uk/>.

Please do not include personal/private information in your Facebook posts/messages to us. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libelous statements
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright Private, personal information published without consent Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam

Non-compliance will not be tolerated and can result in a ban.

The Council are not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum; opinions expressed in comments on the Council's social media forums do not necessarily represent those of the Council.

4. Management Policy for Posting Comments

- 4.1 All comments, once posted, become the property of the Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.
- 4.2 The Council is not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook and any linked websites is at your own risk.
- 4.3 The Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
- 4.4 Facebook may occasionally be unavailable, and we accept no responsibility for this lack of service.
- 4.5 The presence of any advertisement on Facebook is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and the Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.
- 4.6 We will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.
- 4.7 Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.
- 4.8 This comment policy may be revised at any time.
- 4.9 By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Council Social Media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

5 Code of Practice regarding Social Media and e-mails

Individual councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail addresses which is used for Council business. Councillors are expected to have separate Council and personal email addresses and to comply with the Code of Practice.

5.1 Guidance when using social media including emails.

- 5.1.1 All social media use will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.
- 5.1.2 When participating in any online communication:
 - Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent;
 - Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Council;
 - Never knowingly make false or misleading statements;
- 5.1.3 Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies;
- 5.1.4 Keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.
- 5.1.5 Correct any errors promptly;
- 5.1.6 Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should **not** be published on any social media site by councillors or residents;
- 5.1.7 Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
- 5.1.8 Do not make comments about individual's by name unless you have their permission
- 5.1.9 Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought both from the Council and persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded;
- 5.1.10 Permission to retain personal data, publish and share email addresses needs to comply with the General Data Protection Legislation 2018;
- 5.1.11 Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- 5.1.12 Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
- 5.1.13 Residents and councillors should note that **not** all communication requires a response. There may not be immediate response to communications as it may be necessary to discuss the issue with the Council and a response may have to be agreed by the Council. When appropriate a reply will be sent and copied to all councillors.
- 5.1.14 Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda, the persons will then be advised of this fact and told of the date and time of meeting so he/she can attend if they wish. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.